LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS BEST PRACTICES GUIDEBOOK

For VQB5 2023-2024

Purpose of This Document

The purpose of this document is to provide Ready Regions, local CLASS observers, and program leaders with guidance, protocols, answers to FAQs, and links to resources for conducting local CLASS observations and feedback sessions in the Unified Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5) during the 2023-2024 Year. This information is based on the VQB5 2023-2024 Guidelines, which were approved by the Virginia Board of Education on June 15, 2023.

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INTRODUCTION: USING CLASS® IN VQB5

The quality of interactions between teachers and children is measured in VQB5 through use of the nationally recognized CLASS® tool. CLASS stands for **CL**assroom **A**ssessment **S**coring **S**ystem. The CLASS® is a tool for observing and assessing the characteristics of interactions among teachers and children in classrooms developed at the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL).

Rationale for Using CLASS in VQB5

The CLASS tool was chosen for use in VQB5 because it provides a rigorous and consistent approach to observing and measuring teacher-child interactions during critical developmental periods, while still providing a context-specific and developmentally-sensitive metric for each age group. In addition:

- The CLASS is the most researched and validated observation measure of early childhood teaching and classroom quality. Over 200 published studies show that students who attend classrooms with higher CLASS scores have better social and academic outcomes.
- All children benefit socially and academically from being in classrooms with high quality teacher-child interactions as measured by CLASS, including classrooms and family day homes with diverse populations: Dual Language Learners (DLL), children from migrant families, tribal communities, children with special needs, and children from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Interactions, when measured by CLASS, promote incremental improvement that motivates educators at every level in the system. CLASS provides actionable feedback for every classroom and can be used with all educators, regardless of background, setting, or credential.

CLASS Tools Used in VQB5

VQB5 uses the Infant, Toddler, and Pre-K CLASS observation tools. Each tool is developed to evaluate the classroom characteristics and teacher-child interactions needed to promote child learning and development within each specific age range. In Virginia's system, family day home sites are considered as classrooms as they are places where children are supported to develop and learn (family day homes typically have one classroom).

- Infant CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve birth-18 months
- Toddler CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve 15-36 months
- Pre-K CLASS is used to observe classrooms that serve 3–5-year-olds
    - For 2023-2024, VQB5 will use the original 2008 version of Pre-K CLASS.
- Mixed Age Settings, such as family day homes, use the CLASS tool that aligns with the age of the majority of children served.

To address the unique needs of learners with special needs or developmental delays, ECSE self-contained Pre-K classrooms may be allowed to use the Toddler CLASS based on the children's developmental age and IEP goals. Programs must notify VDOE at VQB5@doe.virginia.gov by October 1 to request the use of the Toddler CLASS tool and are subject to annual verification and requests for documentation.

Certified CLASS Observers

Observers using the CLASS tool must successfully complete observer training and pass the reliability test through Teachstone to receive an official observer card and certificate from Teachstone. Only Teachstone is permitted to determine an individual's reliability and certification status for purposes of being eligible to complete CLASS observations for VQB5.

In addition to being a certified observer and using the appropriate age-level CLASS manual, CLASS observers in VQB5 must use Teachstone's guidance for conducting observations in the following settings:

- Family Day Homes – Observing in Family Child Care Settings
- Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms – Guidance for Using CLASS in Settings that Serve Children with Disabilities
- Classrooms with Dual Language Learners - Observing in Settings Serving Dual Language Learners, Birth-to-Five

CLASS Domains and Dimensions Used in VQB5

For each age-level, the CLASS tool organizes effective classroom interactions into broad categories or domains, which are further subdivided into dimensions. These dimensions are based solely on observed interactions between teachers and children in classrooms; the CLASS tool does not evaluate the presence of materials, the physical environment or safety, or the adoption of a specific curriculum. VQB5 CLASS observations include all applicable domains and dimensions for each age-level tool as listed below.

Infant Domain and Dimensions	Toddler Domains and Dimensions	Pre-K Domains and Dimensions
Responsive Caregiving • Relational Climate (RC) • Teacher Sensitivity (TS) • Facilitated Exploration (FE) • Early Language Support (ELS)	**Emotional and Behavioral Support** • Positive Climate (PC) • Negative Climate (NC) • Teacher Sensitivity (TS) • Regard for Child Perspectives (RCP) • Behavior Guidance (BG) **Engaged Support for Learning** • Facilitation of Learning & Development (FLD) • Quality of Feedback (QF) • Language Modeling (LM)	**Emotional Support** • Positive Climate (PC) • Negative Climate (NC) • Teacher Sensitivity (TS) • Regard for Student Perspectives (RSP) **Classroom Organization** • Behavior Management (BM) • Productivity (PR) • Instructional Learning Formats (ILF) **Instructional Support** • Concept Development (CD) • Quality of Feedback (QF) • Language Modeling (LM)
To learn more about CLASS Domains and Dimensions: • View CLASS Dimensions Summary Tools for age-level dimension descriptions • View Birth-to-Five CLASS Dimension Alignment summary		

Scoring With the CLASS

In accordance with the manual, CLASS observers in VQB5 capture lower quality and higher quality behaviors that are demonstrated in classrooms. CLASS requires the observer to assign one score for each dimension per observation cycle based on the degree to which certain behavioral markers characterize the classroom during that cycle. A score from 1 (minimally characteristic) to 7 (highly characteristic) is given for each dimension and represents the extent to which that dimension is characteristic of that classroom.

Scores are assigned using the following scale for each dimension.

1. **Low scores (1-2)** are assigned when behaviors associated with a dimension were demonstrated in a low-quality manner, were lacking, or were rarely present in the classroom interactions.
2. **Mid scores (3-5)** are assigned when the classroom interactions associated with a dimension were somewhat present during the classroom observation or a part of some children's experience.
3. **High scores (6-7)** are assigned when the classroom interactions were highly characteristic of a dimension during the observation. High-range behaviors are those that are meaningful, consistent, sustained, and reflective of everyone's experience in the classroom.

In VQB5, CLASS scores are used to better understand what children are experiencing in the classroom. Lower range scores indicate that children are experiencing lower quality interactions. Higher range scores indicate that children are experiencing higher quality interactions. Classrooms are observed multiple times a year to provide a complete reflection of what children are experiencing throughout the year.

To learn more about CLASS scores and how they are used in VQB5:

- View Understanding the Highs and Lows of CLASS Scores
- View the VQB5 Practice Rating User Guide
- View Section 6 'Determining VQB5 Quality Results' in the VQB5 Guidelines

Observation Cycles in VQB5

CLASS provides specific directions for observing classrooms, including family day homes, as outlined in the manual for each age-level tool.

- Each cycle of observation for Pre-K and Toddler CLASS consists of a 20-minute period during which the observer watches classroom interaction and takes notes followed by a 10-minute period for recording scores.
- Observation cycles are 15 minutes in Infant CLASS followed by a 10-minute period for recording scores.

CLASS Observations in VQB5 require four observation cycles for all CLASS observations. This results in a total of 80 minutes of observed teacher-child interactions in preschool and toddler classrooms, and 60 minutes of observed interactions in infant classrooms.

Types of CLASS Observations in VQB5

There are two types of CLASS observations conducted in VQB5: local and external observations. These observations have different purposes and frequencies during the annual measurement and improvement cycle as described below.

	Local Observations	External Observations
Purpose	Used for gathering classroom-level information about the quality of teacher-child interactions and to provide individualized feedback in VQB5.	Used by the state to gather information about the accuracy and consistency of local observations across the Ready Regions and to provide additional feedback in VQB5.
Definition	Coordinated and scheduled at the local level through Ready Regions, with results recorded in LinkB5. Conducted by locally identified reliable observers.	Coordinated, scheduled, and recorded for the state by the Teachstone External Observation Team. Conducted by externally identified reliable Teachstone observers.
Annual Cycle	In VQB5, all birth-to-five classrooms will get two local observations each year. One in the fall and one in the spring.	In VQB5, only some birth-to-five classrooms will get an external observation. All sites will receive external observations in at least one of their classrooms, for each age-level.

To learn more about external observations in VQB5

- View External CLASS® Observations in Virginia - Teachstone

LOCAL OBSERVATION REQUIREMENTS

Local CLASS observations are used to gather classroom level information about the quality of teacher-child interactions and to provide individualized feedback to educators. In a VQB5 local CLASS observation, certified observers from the local community, such as principals, site directors, early childhood coordinators, or instructional specialists, conduct observations of the early childhood classrooms within their community. Local CLASS Observations are coordinated by Ready Regions and occur twice a year in every participating classroom.

Requirements For Local Observers

In addition to being certified by Teachstone, local observers must meet the following requirements:

- Local observers must be reliable for each tool they observe with (Pre-K, Toddler, Infant)
- Local observers must maintain their certification each year by passing the recertification test.
    - If more than a year has lapsed, local observers need to take the CLASS Observer Training and certification again before conducting any CLASS observation.

Ready Regions have discretion in who may serve as local observers. Local observers may have working relationships with the sites and/or teachers they are observing, such as site director, program coordinator, or principal.

- Local observers are not allowed to observe teachers that they have a direct personal relationship with, such as a spouse or other relative.
- Local observers are not allowed to serve as VQB5 external CLASS observers in Virginia within the same region.

- To learn more about Ready Regions visit the Ready Regions Website.
- For resources to help build local observer capacity view Get Ready VA website

Annual Local Observation Requirements

Ready Regions are responsible for making sure that every participating classroom is locally observed twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. All local observations must take place during the following observation windows.

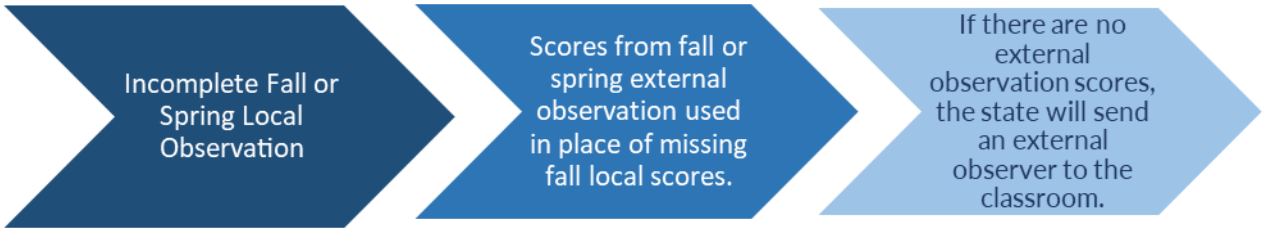
1. The fall local observation window occurs from August 15 to December 22.
2. The spring local observation window occurs from January 20 to May 31.

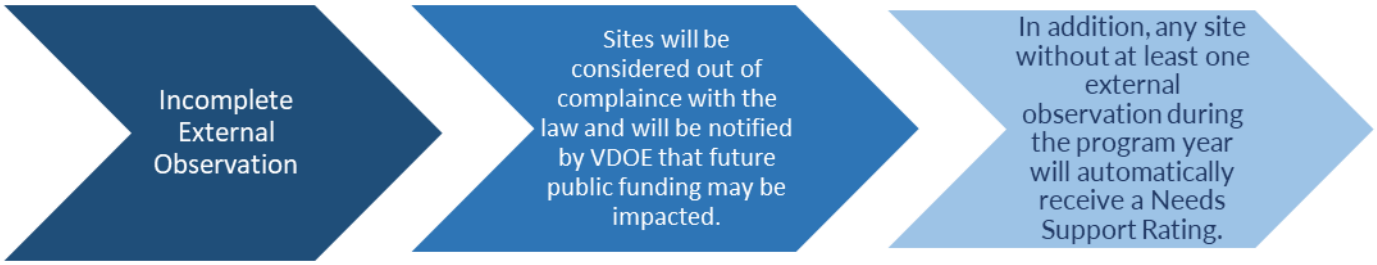
Fall local CLASS observations should not be scheduled during the first two weeks of school, to give teachers and children an opportunity to adjust to the classroom setting.

Local CLASS observations completed outside of these observation windows will not be counted in the site's overall quality rating.

Consequences for Not Completing Required CLASS Observations

All sites participating in VQB5 are required to complete local and external CLASS observations. In cases where the required observations do not take place, a set of actions will be followed to support the most complete collection of data for the site.





See Section 4.8 in VQB5 Guidelines for additional details about consequences for not completing required observations.

LOCAL OBSERVATION PROTOCOLS

The following procedures are to be followed for all local CLASS observations in VQB5. Ready Regions are responsible for ensuring all local observers receive training and ongoing support with observation protocols.

A. BEFORE THE LOCAL OBSERVATION	
A.1 Determining Which Tool to Use	Local observations will be conducted in all infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms in sites participating in VQB5 using the following developmentally-appropriate tools: • Infant CLASS should be used to observe classrooms that serve birth-18 months • Toddler CLASS should be used to observe classrooms that serve 15-36 months • Pre-K CLASS should be used to observe classrooms that serve 3–5-year-olds ○ For 2023-2024, VQB5 will use the original 2008 version of Pre-K CLASS. For observations in mixed-age classrooms and family day homes, the following guidelines are to be used to determine the appropriate age-group tool. • If the classroom contains a mix of infants, toddlers, and Pre-K aged children, use the tool that matches the majority of the children. For instance, if a classroom includes 1 infant, 1 toddler, and 5 Pre-K children, use the Pre-K CLASS tool. • If there are an equal number of children across age groups, use the Toddler tool. For instance, if a classroom includes 3 toddlers and 3 Pre-K children, use the Toddler CLASS tool. To address the unique needs of learners with special needs or developmental delays, ECSE self-contained Pre-K classrooms may be allowed to use the Toddler CLASS based on the children's developmental age and IEP goals. • Programs must notify VDOE at VQB5@doe.virginia.gov by October 1 to request the use of the Toddler CLASS tool and are subject to annual verification and requests for documentation.
A.2 Observing in Diverse Settings	In addition to selecting the appropriate age-level CLASS manual, observers must review guidance provided by Teachstone for conducting observations in the following settings: • Family Day Homes - Guidance for Observing in Family Day Homes • Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms - Guidance for Using

	CLASS in Settings that Serve Children with Disabilities • Classrooms with Dual Language Learners - Observing in Settings Serving Dual Language Learners, Birth-to-Five Observers must be able to speak and understand the primary language of instruction used in the classroom.
A.3 Notification of Local Observations	Ready Regions may provide programs with a predetermined window of time during which unannounced local observations may take place or they may optionally decide to tell programs the exact time and date of their local observation. Ready Regions are not required to notify teachers when local observations are taking place.
A.5 Foundational CLASS Training	Ready Regions must ensure that all teachers and leaders who are new to CLASS are provided with opportunities to complete foundational CLASS training prior to the classroom observation.
A.6 Health and Safety Procedures	Local setting (e.g., school-based, community-based) procedures and requirements for volunteers and visitors must always be followed (e.g., health & safety, background check, identification presented). Ready Regions or the local observer must ask about these procedures prior to the observation.
A.7 Recorded Video and Remote-Live Observations	Use of recorded video or remote-live observations is allowed in VQB5 provided that the following guidance provided by Teachstone is followed. Recorded Video Observations are those in which the teacher and children are recorded via video tape while they are physically together in a classroom, and then scored at a later time by a CLASS certified observer. • Guidance for Recording and Coding Video Observations Remote-live observations are those in which the teacher and children are physically together in a classroom, but the observer joins via Zoom or another video conferencing platform that allows the observer to watch the classroom in real time. • Guidance for Conducting Remote-Live Observations

B. DURING THE LOCAL OBSERVATION	
B.1 Length of Observations	Pre-K and Toddler Observations include four 20-minute observation cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle (approximately 2 hours total). Infant CLASS observations include four 15-minute cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle. There are a few circumstances where it is allowable for a cycle to be less than 20 minutes, such as a fire drill or sudden illness of the teacher that occurs in the middle of an observation cycle. In these situations, CLASS codes can still be assigned, provided that at least 10 minutes of observation have occurred. Local observers should use the guidance in Chapter 2 of each age-level CLASS manual, in the section on "*Rules for What to Observe and Terminating a Cycle*".
B.2 Activities to Observe	Local observers should ask about the typical classroom schedule prior to the observation to ensure that both structured and unstructured times of the day can be observed. Activities, transitions, and routines, including snacks and meals, in the morning or afternoon may be observed (mornings are typically preferred). Time periods that should not be observed include: when the whole group leaves the classroom for “specials” which are taught by a different teacher (such as PE, music, art), or for cafeteria meals when children are allowed to sit with peers from different classrooms and are not supervised by one of their lead teachers. In the case of children napping in infant, toddler, and mixed age classrooms (such as family day homes), only one child needs to be awake in order for the observation to proceed. For preschool classrooms, nap time should not be observed. Observation of outdoor activities varies by age-level. Observers should follow the guidance in each age-level manual to determine whether or not outdoor activities should be included in the observation cycle.
B.3 Adults to Observe	The lead teacher should be present. Long-term substitutes may be observed in the assigned lead teachers place if they have been present in the classroom for 10 consecutive days. If a new lead teacher is assigned to a classroom during the fall or spring observation window, they should not be observed during their first 2 weeks to give them time to adjust to their new teaching assignment. Observations in the following situations may also be conducted when the lead teacher or a long-term sub is not present in order to observe children’s typical experiences: • A director, assistant teacher, substitute, or floater teacher who has led instruction for 10 or more non-consecutive days within the

	observation window can be observed. • A short-term substitute can be observed, if there is another adult instructional leader in the room that typically leads instruction when the lead teacher is not present (such as an assistant teacher). Observers should follow the CLASS manual, which states that observers watch children's interactions with all teachers/adults in the room/area. At times, teachers may switch groups of children throughout the day. If this is typical practice and the lead teacher is still present and engaged with children, the observer may continue to observe even if the children in the classroom have changed.
B.4 Child Attendance	At least 50% of children enrolled (or typically in attendance) must be present during the observation. If less than 50% of children are present when the observer arrives, and this is not typical attendance for this time of day, Ready Regions will work with the program to reschedule the local observation. If less than 50% of child attendance occurs again during the rescheduled observation, Ready Regions should notify VDOE. This may be considered a concerning pattern and may result in additional external observations to ensure the site can meet requirements.
B.5 Observer Interactions	Observers should use a gaze that appears to float over the teacher, child, or group rather than directly staring at individuals for long periods of time. If children approach the observer, observers should only acknowledge their presence with a warm smile or a nod. More engagement than this may cause the observer to distract from classroom processes being observed, and potentially disrupt the classroom and observation results.
B.6 Note-taking and Note Retention	Detailed notes with concrete examples must be taken for each dimension during every observation cycle. All notes and scores must be recorded on the official CLASS scoresheets. Original or complete copies of scoresheets with notes from local observations must be saved as back-up documentation for at least two years after the observation. (See Item C.4 below for record keeping details.)
B.7 Scoring Cycles	For the 10-minute coding sessions following each 20-minute observation cycle, observers may elect to remain in the classroom or leave the classroom to complete coding. Observers do not conduct observations during the 10-minute coding sessions. Observers do not conduct more than four cycles of observations.

B.8 Health and Safety Concerns	In the unusual circumstance of any suspected abuse or neglect observed at the time of the observation, the observer must report the observed behaviors to Child Protective Services as mandated by law. For other observed issues that significantly impact the health and safety of the children in care, observers can report concerns to the VDOE. Local observers must report observed health and safety concerns to Ready Regions. Ready Regions must share reported concerns with VDOE (vqb5@doe.virginia.gov). Additional details can be found in the VDOE Mandated Reporter Guidance document.
C. AFTER THE LOCAL OBSERVATION	
C.1 Determining Scores	When determining CLASS scores, observers follow the guidelines on the appropriate pages of the CLASS manual and CLASS Scoring Summary Sheet.
C.2 Submitting Scores into LinkB5	Local observation scores must be entered into the LinkB5 data portal within 10 business days of the observation, or by the end of the observation period, whichever is first. Scores for Toddler and Pre-K Negative Climate should be entered in LinkB5 as the raw score (not reversed). All local observers are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of their CLASS scores before submitting scores in LinkB5.
C.3 Site Admin Score Review and Verification in LinkB5	Once scores have been submitted by the local observer in LinkB5, the primary site administrator, or other designated site administrator, must review and verify scores in LinkB5 within 10 business days, or by the end of the observation window whichever comes first. Verification of scores in LinkB5 includes checking to make sure the following observation information is accurate: • The name of the local observer • The date the observation occurred • The Negative Climate scores have been entered as the raw score (not reversed) If the information listed above was not entered correctly, the site administrator should reject the scores in LinkB5 and contact the Ready Region. Observers must make requested corrections within 3 business days, or by the end of the observation period, whichever is first. Ready Regions may request additional documentation from the observer to verify the accuracy of the requested correction if needed. If the site administrator rejects the CLASS scores due to a concern about the observation results, the site should immediately request a VDOE CLASS observation review by emailing vqb5@doe.virginia.gov.

C.4 Record Keeping	After the local observation and feedback form have been completed, observers send their CLASS scoresheets to the Ready Region lead agency. It is also acceptable for original or complete copies of scoresheets to be stored securely by the observer as long as they are easily accessible if requested for an audit by the Ready Region Lead and/or VDOE within 3 business days.
C.5 Feedback	The observer (or assigned feedback provider, in the case that a local observer is not in a position to provide the teacher feedback) must schedule a time to meet with each teacher or teaching team within 10 business days of the observation, or by the end of the observation period, whichever is first. Local observers should use either the feedback templates posted on the VDOE VQB5 webpage, or another similar template provided by Ready Regions to share scores, ranges, and notes on what was observed (including positive examples). Local observers should provide high-quality supportive feedback that recognizes teachers' strengths while also focusing on opportunities for growth and skill development. (See Improvement Section for more information about providing effective feedback.)

CLASS Observation Review Process

Site administrators or teachers who have a concern about their results from local or external CLASS observations, may request a formal review from VDOE by emailing vqb5@doe.virginia.gov during the program year.

- VDOE CLASS Review requests for fall observations must be submitted by January 12.
- VDOE CLASS Review requests for spring observations must be submitted by June 7.

For all requests submitted, VDOE will work with the Ready Region and/or the Teachstone External Observation Team to gather all relevant observation data, observation scoresheets with notes, feedback forms provided to sites/teacher, other information from the observer and/or teacher that relates to the reason for the review request such as copies of classroom daily schedules, copies of lesson plans from the day of the observation, teacher/student attendance records, or other types of related evidence.

The VDOE will use the review process to determine if there are discrepancies or other concerns with the observation(s). If discrepancies or concerns are found, the VDOE will address the situation, typically using an external observation to replace the original score. (See Section 4.9 in the VQB5 Guidelines for more information about CLASS Review Requests.)

Score Replacement Protocol

To ensure the consistency, quality, and credibility of ratings and performance profiles, VQB5 will use a score replacement protocol to address comparable observations with significantly different scores. Throughout the fall and spring observation windows, the VDOE will compare all local and external observations that are completed in the same classroom during the same observation window (e.g., fall observation window or spring observation window).

- Domain scores for local and external observations will be compared by calculating the difference.
- If the difference between the local domain score and the external domain score is greater than 1.0 point, then the external score will replace the local score within that specific domain.

If score replacement is necessary in one or more domains, observation scores for each dimension within the replaced domain occurs at classroom score calculation step. When domain scores are replaced, VDOE will notify the site, the designated local observer and the Ready Region at the end of the fall and spring observation cycles. (See Section 4.7 in the VQB5 Guidelines for more information, and Appendix B for score replacement examples.)

LOCAL OBSERVER SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Ready Regions and other program leaders should strive to help local observers understand all aspects of the VQB5 CLASS requirements and observation protocols, especially those elements which differ from general CLASS observation protocols.

Support for local observers takes three main forms: 1) in-the-field questions, 2) group meetings, and 3) quality assurance checks.

1) **Support in the field** - Although local observers will be trained on CLASS observation protocols, unusual circumstances may arise while observers are in the field. In these cases, a Ready Regions team member or other program leader who is certified on the CLASS tool and knowledgeable about VQB5 protocols should be available to answer questions in a timely manner.
2) **Group meetings** - Regularly-scheduled group meetings allow local observers to discuss any coding-related or logistical challenges, hear updates about VQB5, and receive professional development on how to provide effective feedback. The frequency of meetings will vary by purpose, but VDOE recommends that Ready Regions provide at least one group meeting prior to the start of each observation window (fall and spring) for local observers.
3) **Quality Assurance Checks** - Quality assurance checks are methods used to ensure that observers are following the proper protocols and coding reliably in the field. This includes methods such as fidelity checks, calibrations, and double coding, each of which are described in more detail below.

Type of Quality Assurance Check	Description and Guidance
Fidelity Checks Used to ensure that observers are following the correct protocols when conducting observations.	Fidelity checks consist of an experienced observer watching another observer to see if they follow all steps of the protocol (both general CLASS coding procedure and VQB5-specific elements) in a professional manner. This typically includes watching the observer prior to the start of the observation and for one or two cycles to ensure proper check-in and coding procedures are being followed. Fidelity checks may be conducted in conjunction with double coding if the additional coder is trained to conduct fidelity checks. If an observer does not follow protocol during a fidelity check, they should receive additional training prior to observing again.
Calibrations Used to practice coding between annual recertification and to provide observers with individualized feedback.	Observers watch a 15-20-minute master coded video and assign scores to be compared to the master codes. After coding the video, observers receive immediate and individualized feedback on their scoring. At a minimum, VDOE recommends that local observers calibrate at least once every 6 months. An acceptable pass rate is considered to be 80% or above. Observers who do not pass a calibration should receive additional support and recalibrate within 30 days.
Double Coding Used to strengthen observation skills and ensure overall coding consistency.	In double coding, two certified observers complete observation cycles in the same classroom independently, but simultaneously. There are two primary types of double coding as outlined below. After the observation, scores are reviewed to assess the interrater reliability score. In both types of double coding, an interrater reliability rate of 80% or above is considered an acceptable consistency rate. 1) **Peer**: Two observers, regardless of experience level, compare their scores with one another. Peer double coding can vary in

	length, from 1-4 cycles, based on observer needs. Both coders receive the same reliability score. Observers should not change any scores based on the other observer's scores. For VQB5 local observations, double coding between peers can only be used to practice scoring. Scores from a peer double coding session cannot be used for an official local observation score. 2) **Anchor**: A less experienced observer, observes with an expert (anchor) observer, such as someone who has been observing with CLASS for more than one year or a CLASS affiliate trainer. The anchor observer's scores are treated as the "master code," and the less experienced observer is given a reliability score. This type of double coding allows less experienced observers to receive feedback on the coding process. For VQB5, an anchor's scores can be used for the official local observation score if the anchor was approved by Ready Regions prior to conducting the double coding session.

See Appendix A for information about Training Hours for Observer Certification Activities.

Using External Observation Feedback to Support Local Observers

Ready Regions and other program leaders should regularly compare the results from external observation feedback reports to local observation results to identify local observer strengths and needs.

The following guidance can be used for local-external score comparison and professional development planning.

- Scores within one point are considered to be reliable and indicate areas of consistency.
- Scores that differ by more than one point indicate areas of inconsistencies and should be targeted areas for local observer improvement support.
    - Local observers will receive notice of domain level scores that are off by more than one point and have been replaced during the fall and spring observation cycles at the end of each observation window.
    - Information on the frequency of score replacement, or recurring domains for score replacement, should be factored into what type of support is provided to local observers.

Resources for supporting observer reliability and consistency are available on the Teachstone Reliability Support website.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUPPORTS

An important feature of VQB5 is that measurement, feedback, and supports are ongoing and frequent. Educators and leaders have opportunities to measure their progress multiple times a year. At the same time, reflection on data is embedded throughout the measurement cycle. This leads to continuous growth, year over year.

Preparing Educators for CLASS Observations

Before classroom observations are conducted, teachers and program leaders need to understand what is being measured and why. Ready Regions are responsible for ensuring that all teachers and leaders who are new to CLASS are provided with opportunities to complete foundational CLASS training prior to being observed.

- Foundational CLASS training for **teachers** focuses on the CLASS tool that covers the age-level of the children in their classroom, including how the CLASS tool organizes interactions by domains and dimensions, for a specific age-level.
- Foundational CLASS training for **program leaders** focuses on CLASS tools for different age-levels in the program. Foundational CLASS training is different from Reliable Observer training in that it is much shorter and accessible via online and in-person options.

Foundational CLASS training also provides information about what teachers can expect when an observer comes to their classroom as well as an overview of the types of information they'll receive after an observation.

Providing Feedback to Support Improvement

In VQB5, all site leaders and teachers benefit from receiving frequent and specific feedback provided through CLASS observations conducted at least twice a year at the local level in every classroom, and at least once at every site within each age-level served, by the external observation contractor, as summarized below:

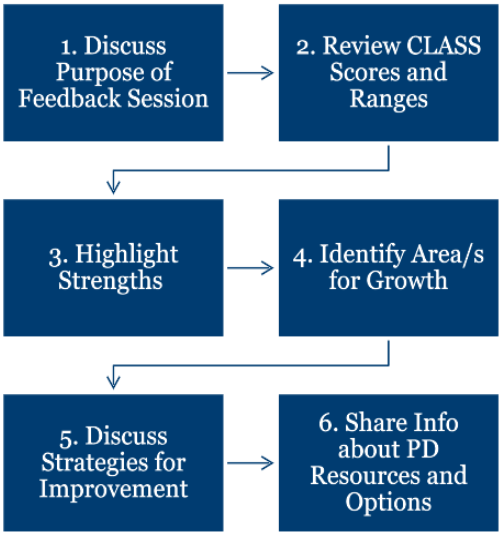
Feedback from Local Observations	Feedback from External Observations
• Local Observer schedules a feedback session with teacher or team of teachers within 10 days of the local observation. • Feedback meeting held in-person, virtually (e.g., Zoom), or over the phone based on teacher's availability. This provides the teacher with an opportunity to receive individualized feedback and ask questions if needed. • In addition to verbal feedback, the Local Observer provides individualized written feedback to the teacher and program leaders.	• Feedback is shared via a written report which is emailed to the primary site administrator 10 days after the external observation. • The external feedback report format has been standardized to ensure external observation feedback is provided in an efficient and consistent manner statewide. • The primary site administrator should share the external feedback report with the teacher, other program leaders, Ready Regions, and others that support quality improvement.

Local Observation Feedback Sessions

One of the largest benefits of local CLASS observations is that teachers can receive more frequent feedback on their practice, at least twice a year from a local individual who already supports their practice (such as when the observer is a site leader). Local observation feedback provides teachers with an opportunity to recognize growth and provides program leaders with a complete reflection of what children are experiencing throughout the year.

Results and feedback from local observations can be used by program leaders to inform program level goals as well as goals for individualized professional development, within the context of infant, toddler, and preschool settings.

The following steps should be used to prepare for and guide effective feedback sessions for local CLASS observations, which include:



1. Start with a general conversation and work to make teachers feel comfortable. Orienting teachers to the structure of the local feedback form.
2. Review dimension and domain level scores, calling attention to score range trends. (i.e., scores in the high range, mid range, low range). It may also be helpful to share state and regional CLASS data for comparison. View publicly available CLASS data averages for Virginia.
3. Highlight areas of strength (focus on the positive first). If the teacher has had a previous CLASS observation, this step should also include highlighting areas of growth from the last observation. Encourage the teacher to reflect on the reasons for improvement.
4. Identify areas for growth by domain, unpacking specific examples. Work with the teacher to determine a dimension or one aspect of a dimension to be an area of focus for improvement.
5. Identify specific strategies or action steps that teachers can do to practice implementing quality interactions with children in a targeted manner, such as referring teacher to the CLASS Dimension Guide strategy tip pages.
6. Connect teachers to additional CLASS resources and information about other professional development options for ongoing improvement support.

Ready Regions are responsible for ensuring all local observers have training and support in providing individualized strengths-based feedback as outlined above.

Local observers should use the feedback templates provided by VDOE for Infant, Toddler, Pre-K, or another similar feedback template provided by Ready Regions to share scores, ranges, and examples of what was observed (including positive examples).

Targeted Support for Ongoing Improvement

Results from local observations are used by improvement partners and other program leaders to inform ongoing professional development and assess growth in teacher-child interactions over time. Increasing capacity and knowledge of quality interactions at the local level promotes shared understandings of the strong principles of high-quality teaching in early childhood settings that are highlighted in the CLASS tool. Having program or school division leaders trained to reliability in CLASS enables them to bring the CLASS lens to every aspect of their work.

Below are some free/low-cost resources and strategies that can be used by program leaders and other improvement partners to help teachers improve teacher-child interactions.

Resource/Strategy	How to Use	Example/More Info
CLASS Dimension Guide	Refer to guide during feedback sessions for practical strategies to improve interactions.	Dimension Guides available online or from Ready Regions
Informal "Walk-Throughs" (or) "Focused Observations"	Conduct short (10-15 min) observations with the CLASS tool in-between official fall/spring local observations.	Informal Observation form and instructions
Teacher Self-Assessments	Reflect on interactions in-between fall/spring local CLASS observations.	Infant, Toddler, and Pre-K Teacher Self-Assessments
Peer-to-Peer Learning	Share and discuss teacher-tips blog, or podcasts about CLASS during staff meetings.	Teacher-Tips and Teaching With CLASS Podcasts
Video Exemplars	Watch videos from real classrooms for specific CLASS dimensions.	LA-Piccard Center CLASS Video Library
Curriculum and CLASS Connections	Refer to curriculum materials for lesson plans and guidance that support high quality interactions.	VDOE CLASS and Curriculum Connections and the ECE Resource Hub

View the 2023-2024 VQB5 Improvement Supports Overview for a list of improvement partners that the VDOE works with and provides funding arrangements for through either federal or state funding sources. These partners provide training, TA, coaching, and/or coursework to help improve the early childhood system.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

1. **Will VDOE provide the training for local CLASS observers to become trained and reliable for local observations?**

During the 2023-2024 year, VDOE is offering monthly observer training opportunities in partnership with Teachstone to build local observer capacity for childcare centers and family day homes VQB5. Details and registration information can be found here.

- Ready Regions are also funded by VDOE to support ongoing CLASS training for VQB5, both to train reliable observers and to provide foundational CLASS knowledge to teachers.
- VPI Programs may also support CLASS trainings with VPI PD funding.
- The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) maintains a list of qualified Certified Affiliate CLASS trainers who are able to conduct Introduction to CLASS and CLASS Observer training for VQB5. For a list of current VECF Affiliate CLASS trainers in your locality, please email qris@vecf.org

2. **Where can I find a list of certified CLASS observers in Virginia?**

There are two types of Observer Directories available from Teachstone. Both directories provide an opportunity to search for certified observers by location, age-level tool, and language.

- The Public Directory includes a list of Certified CLASS Observers who are interested in being hired by organizations. (CLASS observers must opt-in for the public directory.)
- The Private Directory is available to anyone who has a Teachstone website account, and lists all certified observers within the online database.
- Ready Regions also maintain lists of local CLASS observers, by age-level, for their region.

3. **Do site leaders have to conduct their own local observations?**

Program leaders who are CLASS certified have the **option** to conduct some or all of their own local observations, in partnership with Ready Regions. To make this decision, program leaders should consider:

- Experience with CLASS and/or experience conducting CLASS observations
- The size of the program (i.e., number of classrooms, age-levels served)
- Availability to conduct observations and feedback sessions with teachers
- Availability of other site leaders who can also conduct local observations at the site
- Ability to receive constructive feedback and commitment to engage in ongoing practice to strengthen observer skills

4. **Can teachers conduct local CLASS observations in their own site, or at other sites?**

This is a local decision based on the roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers. To make this decision site leaders and Ready Regions should:

- Consider the amount of time that the teacher would be out of their own classroom. Having teachers conduct other non-classroom activities, such as observations, should be kept to a minimum in order to ensure children's instructional time isn't negatively impacted.
- Consider any potential conflict of interest or potential bias issues. Teachers who conduct observations at their own site or other sites should complete calibrations and/or double coding sessions to reduce potential bias and to maintain accuracy at least every 6 months.
- Consider the teacher's roles and responsibilities with other work assignments. For example, if an experienced teacher is currently serving as a peer-mentor for new teachers, using local observations as part of the mentoring process could be an opportunity to provide strengths-based feedback and goal setting to improve teaching practices.
- Consider staff culture and program norms. Staff who are used to having peers observe each other for ongoing professional development may find local CLASS observations

conducted by their peers more supportive than at a site where peer-observation is not a common or supported practice.

5. How much time does it take to conduct a local CLASS observation?

The average estimated time per local observation is:

- 2 hours observing in a classroom
- 30 minutes for feedback report development
- 30 minutes for sharing feedback with the teacher/site leader
- Additional travel time to/from observations may also need to be considered

6. Can coaches conduct local CLASS observations?

This is a program-level decision based on the roles and responsibilities of coaches within different organizations. Since coaches typically focus more on small moments of effectiveness and supporting improvement, observing with the CLASS through a coach lens may skew the local CLASS scores of the classroom, particularly when a coach has an established and ongoing improvement-focused relationship with the teacher being observed.

- If Ready Regions or other program leaders decide to use coaches as local observers, the following steps should be taken to ensure consistency and to avoid any potential observer bias:
    - Ensure there is no personal relationship between the coach and the teacher being observed that could potentially be a conflict of interest
    - Provide coaches with training on the established VQB5 local observation protocols and procedures outlined in this guidebook.
    - Provide coaches who are observing in VQB5 with resources that support ongoing consistency (See Reliability Support website)
    - Use quality assurance checks and external observation feedback reports for score comparison. (See 'Local Observer Supports' section)

7. How detailed should CLASS observation notes be?

Observation notes form the foundation for the coding process, and good notes increase the chances that the code assigned is a true representation of the classroom. Taking good notes includes being objective, using short-hand or abbreviations, including direct quotes, and specific examples about CLASS dimension indicators.

- Chapter 2 in each age-level CLASS manual provides information about note-taking as well as a sample score sheet with notes.
- Additional tips and strategies for taking notes during CLASS observations can be found HERE.

8. Can observers code during breakfast or lunch if it's being served in the cafeteria?

Since breakfast and lunch are routine activities in which children engage on a daily basis, this can be observed. However, because the structure of cafeteria time for Pre-K children can vary greatly, deciding whether or not to observe meals served in a school cafeteria should be a local level decision.

- Ready Regions and local observers should consider whether or not the classroom teacher/s are present during cafeteria meals as well as how cafeteria time fits into the overall daily schedule to ensure that both structured and unstructured time periods are included in the CLASS observation.
- Additional guidance, along with suggestions for addressing common challenges in the cafeteria can be found HERE.

9. Can CLASS observations conducted as a part of the Federal Office of Head Start (OHS) Monitoring Protocol be used for the VQB5 local observation requirement?

No. OHS CLASS reviews are conducted for the purpose of obtaining a ***recipient*** level score rather than classroom or site-level score, and follow different protocols and procedures.

- Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) programs are encouraged to use the results from VQB5 Local CLASS observations to identify classroom level strengths and needs. This information will help HS/EHS recipients prepare for OHS CLASS reviews.
- HS/EHS recipients should notify their Ready Region lead ahead of time if they are scheduled for an OHS review in the fall or the spring to assist with the coordination and scheduling of local CLASS observations in EHS/HS classrooms.

10. What are the observation requirements for AM/PM Half-day programs?

If a lead teacher provides instruction to one group of children in the morning and a different group of children in the afternoon (i.e., AM/PM half-day sessions), only the AM classroom needs to be observed once in the fall and once in the spring, as long as the following guidelines are met:

- The lead teacher is the same for both the AM and PM classrooms, and
- The group of children in the AM and PM classrooms are the same age-level, and
- The physical space used for instruction is the same for the AM and PM classrooms and,
- The instruction is generally provided in the same manner for the AM/PM classrooms,
- There are no significant differences in the skills taught, language of instruction, or activities for the AM/PM classrooms.
- If a curriculum is used, it must be the same curriculum in both the AM/PM classrooms.

Sites with AM/PM classrooms that meet the requirements above must notify Ready Regions and VDOE by October 1 and are subject to annual verification or requests for documentation. If the above items do not all apply to the AM and PM classrooms, then both the AM and PM classrooms must be observed.

11. Will the 2nd Edition of CLASS be used in VQB5?

For purposes of VQB5, Virginia will continue to use the CLASS 2008 original version of the tool for the 2023-2024 program year in all age groups.

- Virginia has demonstrated a strong investment in this original version of the CLASS tool, and the VQB5 system is well prepared to support its use next year, while continuing to learn about the 2nd Edition enhancements and gather feedback from the field.
- Observers who were originally trained/certified on CLASS 2008 and choose to become certified (or recertified) on CLASS 2nd edition, will be considered reliable on both editions and should use the appropriate manual and scoresheets, as designated by Virginia, when collecting data. (There is no requirement for VQB5 observers to be trained or certified in 2nd Edition).

RESOURCE LINKS TO SUPPORT LOCAL CLASS OBSERVATIONS

Using CLASS in VQB5:

- VDOE Quality Measurement and Improvement (VQB5)
- Ready Regions Information
- LinkB5 Resources
- Teachstone's Virginia Support Page
- Teachstone's External Observation Resources
- VQB5 Practice Rating User Guide
- Questions about the use of CLASS in VQB5 – vqb5@doe.virginia.gov

General Info about CLASS:

- Why CLASS? (e-book)
- CLASS Research Summary
- Tips & Resources for Teachers

Using CLASS in Diverse Settings:

- Family Child Care & CLASS
- CLASS Spanish Suite
- Using CLASS in Settings Serving Children with Disabilities
- Using CLASS with Dual Language Learners

Observer Resources:

- Tips to Prepare for Conducting Observations
- Note-taking Tips and Strategies
- Coding Reflective Questions
- Observer FAQ's

Tools for Feedback:

- VQB5 Local Observation Feedback Templates (Infant/Toddler/Pre-K)
- AEII Providing Observation Feedback
- CLASS Feedback - Teachstone Webinar

Professional Development Tools:

- Strengthening Quality Toolkit (Birth-to-Five)
- Teachstone Resource Library
- Use of CLASS for Quality Improvement (Head Start)
- Curriculum & CLASS Connections - Infants/Toddlers and Pre-K

APPENDIX A: TRAINING HOURS FOR OBSERVER CERTIFICATION ACTIVITIES

In VQB5, local CLASS observations can be conducted by certified CLASS observers from the local community, such as principals, site directors, early childhood coordinators, or instructional specialists. Local CLASS Observations are coordinated by Ready Regions. The activities outlined in the chart below provide local CLASS observers with professional development to maintain reliability and to strengthen CLASS observation skills for consistency and accuracy in VQB5.

If appropriately documented, hours spent completing these activities may be used to meet the training requirements for licensed child day centers, licensed family day homes, and subsidy vendors.

Documentation of training shall include:	
Name of staff	Name of the staff member(s) completing the CLASS Observer Certification activity.
Training topic	Teacher-Child Interactions as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the specific age-level of the applicable CLASS tool (Infant, Toddler, and/or Pre-K CLASS)
Evidence that training has been completed	Completion evidence will vary based on type of activity: • Recertification evidence – CLASS Observer Certificate/Card and/or email from Teachstone regarding passing the reliability test • Calibration evidence – Calibration Completion Report • Double Coding evidence – Copy of Observation Scoresheets or score comparison document, and debriefing session notes • Local Observer Group Meetings – Meeting attendance log or certificate of meeting completion.
Training delivery method	Delivery method will vary based on type of activity: • Recertifications and Calibrations are completed online • Double Coding Sessions are completed in-person, or virtually • Local Observer Group meetings can be completed in-person or virtually
Entity or individual providing training	Entity providing training will vary based on type of activity: • Recertification and Calibrations are provided by Teachstone • Double Coding Sessions and Local Observer Group meetings are provided by Ready Regions lead agencies
The number of training hours or credit hours received	Hours will vary based on type of activity: • Recertification – 5 training hours per age-level recertification • Calibration – 1 training hour • Double Coding – 1-3 hours based on number of observation cycles and length of debrief session • Local Observer Group Meetings – Typically 1-3 hours based on purpose of meeting
Date of training	Date of completion for the applicable CLASS Observer Activity

The documentation of activities to support local CLASS Observation Certification should be kept by the facility in a manner that identifies which individual staff member(s) completed the CLASS Observer Certification Support activities and is considered part of the staff member's record.

Questions about CLASS Observer Certification Activities can be directed to vqb5@doe.virginia.gov

APPENDIX B: CALCULATING THE TOTAL CLASS SCORE

In VQB5, the total CLASS score is calculated by summing the scores for each dimension and dividing by the number of dimensions for the specific age-level tool. Below are three examples to illustrate how a total CLASS score is calculated for an infant, toddler, and preschool classroom.

The Infant CLASS tool has 4 dimensions. All of the dimension scores for the infant observation are added together and then divided by 4.					
Infant Room	**RC**	**TS**	**FE**	**ELS**	**Total CLASS Score**
Dimension Scores	6.00	5.25	4.00	2.75	**4.50 (Mid Range)**
Calculation	**Calculate the total sum** 6.00 + 5.25 + 4.00 + 2.75 = 18				Divide the total by the # of Dimensions 18 divided by 4 = **4.50**

The Toddler CLASS tool has 8 dimensions. All of the dimension scores for the toddler observation are added together and then divided by 8.									
Toddler Room	**PC**	**NC***	**TS**	**RCP**	**BG**	**FLD**	**QF**	**LM**	**Total CLASS Score***
Dimension Scores	5.00	1.25* (reversed score 6.75)	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.25	1.50	3.25	**3.84* (Mid Range)**
Calculation	**Calculate the total sum** 5.00 + 6.75* + 4.00 + 3.00 + 4.00 + 3.25 + 1.50 + 3.25 = 30.75 **Use the reverse NC score when calculating the total sum.*								**Divide the total by the # of Dimensions** 30.75 divided by 8 = **3.84**

**Negative Climate score is reversed when calculating the total dimension average (by subtracting the NC dimension score from 8.)*

The Pre-K CLASS tool has 10 dimensions. All of the dimension scores for the Pre-K observation are added together and then divided by 10.											
Pre-K Room	**PC**	**NC***	**TS**	**RSP**	**BM**	**PR**	**ILF**	**CD**	**QF**	**LM**	**Total CLASS Score***
Dimension Scores	5.25	1.25* (reversed score 6.75)	5.00	3.50	4.75	4.50	3.75	1.75	2.00	3.25	**4.05* (Mid Range)**
Calculation	**Calculate the sum** 5.25 + 6.75* + 5.00 + 3.50 + 4.75 + 4.50 + 3.75 + 1.75 + 2.00 + 3.25 = 40.50 **Use the reverse NC score when calculating the total sum*										**Divide total by # of Dimensions** 40.05 divided by 10 = **4.05**

**Negative Climate score is reversed when calculating the total dimension average. (by subtracting the NC dimension score from 8.)*

The total CLASS score is calculated in the fall and then again in the spring for every classroom. This provides teachers with an opportunity to recognize growth and provides site leaders with a complete reflection of what children are experiencing throughout the year. For information about how the total CLASS score is used to determine a site's Quality Rating Interactions Points, please refer to the VQB5 Practice Rating User Guide.

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF SCORE REPLACEMENT

To ensure consistency of results, VQB5 will replace comparable local scores that are different by more than one point when compared to the external scores at the domain level. (For additional details about score replacement see Section 4.7 in the VQB5 Guidelines)

Score Replacement – Infant Classroom Example #1

Infant Classroom	Relational Climate Domain
Local Fall Domain Score	5.50
External Fall Domain Score	4.75
Difference	.75 (scores are within one point of each other)
Decision	No replacement (Use all local scores)
FINAL Classroom Domain Score Used in Site Quality Rating*	**5.50**

Score Replacement – Toddler Classroom Example #2

Toddler Classroom	Emotional & Behavioral Support Domain	Engaged Support for Learning Domain
Local Fall Domain Scores	4.50	3.00
External Fall Domain Scores	5.00	4.25
Difference	.50 (scores are within one point)	1.25 (scores differ by more than one point)
Decision	No replacement (Use local scores)	Replacement* (Use external scores)
FINAL Classroom Domain Scores Used in Site Quality Rating*	**4.50**	**4.25**

Score Replacement- Pre-K Classroom Example #3

Pre-K Classroom	Emotional Support Domain	Classroom Organization Domain	Instructional Support Domain
Local Fall Domain Scores	6.20	5.45	5.25
External Fall Domain Scores	5.75	4.65	3.45
Difference	.45 (score within one point)	.80 (scores within one point)	1.80 (scores differ by more than one point)
Decision	No replacement (Use local ES scores)	No replacement (Use local CO scores)	Replace* (Use external IS scores)
FINAL Classroom Domain Scores Used in Site Quality Rating*	**6.20**	**5.45**	**3.45**

*If score replacement is necessary in one or more domains, observation scores for each dimension within the replaced domain are used to calculate the site quality rating. (See Section 6.2.1 in the VQB5 Guidelines for more details). For questions about score replacement, email vqb5@doe.virginia.gov